Orleans Coroner Rules Ferrie Died Natural Death Despite Notes Found

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NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 28 Orleans Parish Coroner Nicholas Chetta flatly and finally ruled today that David William Ferrie died a natural death despite several notes found in his apartment suggesting suicide and rejection of homosexual love.

"We know his intent. We know the pressure he was under," Dr. Chetta told reporters. But he stressed that exhaustive tests showed absolutely no sign of suicide or murder.

Ferrie, 49, was once suspected but subsequently cleared by Federal agents of involement in the assasination of President Kennedy. Last week, after death from cerebral hemorrhage, he was again accused by District Attorney Jim Garrison of a key role in "events culminating in the assassination."

Chetta called Ferrie "a psychopath...a dangerous individual capable of almost anything."

Blood Pressure High

But the Coroner said Ferrie could not have killed himself, except perhaps by worrying himself to death under the "stress and strain" of Garrison's investigation. He said Ferrie was suffering from high blood pressure.

Before he died, Ferrie said he never knew Lee Harvey Oswald, who was found by the Warren commission to have been the assassin. But the New Orleans States-Item reported today that a local law enforcement officer says he found Ferrie and Oswald together here shortly before the assassination. At story in a latter edition said that the officer denied that one of the men was Ferrie.

Garrison's office, it was reported, was told by the officer that he found two men sitting together in a parked car near the New Orleans lake front in early morning on a fall day in 1963. One of the men reportedly identified himself as Oswald then.

A flight school instructor and a part-time private investigator, Ferrie left behind a bitter, typewritten note, undated and unsigned, condemning local law enforcement officials and the American court system. He had a record of arrests on homosexual charges.

The note labeled District Attorney Garrison and other law officials as "utterly unfit to hold office."

Note Found in Rooms

"Truth and falsehood, right and wrong, have no place in the courts," the note added. "All the State needs is 'evidence to support a conviction.' If this be justice, then justice be dammed."

Also found in Ferrie's drab dooms was a note to a "Dear Al," again undated and signed with the typewritten parting, "Goodbye, Dave."

"When you receive this," the second note said, "I will be quite dead so no answer will be possible...

"All I can say is that I offered you love and the best I could. All I got in return, in the end, was a kick in the teeth. Hence I die alone and unloved.

"You would not even straighten out Carol about me though this you started when you were going steady. I wonder what your last days and hours are going to be like. As you sow, so shall you reap."

Chetta said he did not know who "Al" was.

Alluded to Charges

In a four-hour interview with me shortly before he died, Ferrie alluded to the homosexual charges in his past by attempting to suggest there was nothing improper in his relationship with young men.

He said he made "a hobby" of taking "deserving youngsters from broken homes" and trying to give them a break in life.

Dr. Chetta said the notes were typed on a Royal found in Ferrie's rooms. He said he recognized the conflict with his finding of natural death and consequently made his tests as painstaking as he could.

The coroner said he has already received several "crank letters" challenging his findings.

The only drug turned up in toxicological tests, however, was some caffeine, Dr. Chetta said. This presumably came from the cup of coffee Ferrie had in the interview with me before his death. He died about 4 a.m. Wednesday, "give or take a couple of hours," Dr. Chetta said. I left Ferrie's flat round 4 a.m.

It has been suggested that Ferrie might have written the "suicide notes" in an earlier mood of depression when he actually intended to kill himself.

Appeared a Saver

The coroner said Ferrie was "definitely manic . .. He had paranoid tendencies, too." He was also apparently a compulsive "saver," of papers, letters, pictures and other memorabilia. Police also found several guns in his apartment, including even an ancient Springfield muzzle-loader.

Dr. Chetta ruled out the possibility that a karate chop might have preduced the ruptured blood vessel that caused Ferrie's death. He said it would have left some slight sign on his skin and there was none.